

Exiting 'Fairly Pleased'

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By John Carmody

Clay T. (Tom) Whitehead leaves official Washington this weekend after four stormy years as director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy, (OTP), "fairly pleased" with his record of accomplishment there.

He suggests however that anyone who was "outside" the Nixon administration "can't possibly understand the depression of Watergate among those who stayed in" during the past 20 months.

Whitehead also believes that he has regained a "much wider perspective of government" during the months since April, when he joined a top secret group which privately set forth details of the transition process for the incoming Ford administration.

These plans even included Vice President Ford's homespun remarks delivered in the street before his Alexandria, Va., home moments after Mr. Nixon's resignation speech the night of Aug. 7— which Whitehead composed.

In the same vein, Whitehead revealed in an interview yesterday that nearly as much turmoil surrounded him personally inside the monolithic Nixon White House as any he attracted in the media with his 1971-73 attacks against network news and public broadcasting.

In fact, Whitehead now says that his highly criticized remarks about "elitist gossip" and "ideological plugola" in network news, delivered in Indianapolis in December, 1972, was actually a successful political maneuver on his part to save OTP from extinction at the hands of highly placed opponents "directly under the President" in the White House.

The 35-year-old economist and policy planner also revealed that:

- President Nixon was "sorely tempted" to "kill public broadcasting" in the early years of his first term and often recited to aides his dislike of government controlled TV he had observed on his travels to Italy, France, Great Britain and Soviet Union.

- Nixon also cited the influence of the "liberal" Ford Foundation (which has supplied the industry with over \$200 million in grants since the early 1950s) in presiden-



By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

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tial memos complaining about public broadcasting in the United States.

- Almost from the start of his own service in OTP in September 1970, Whitehead found himself in a "number

of set-tos" with powerful men like Secretary of State William Rogers, Attorney General John Mitchell and Transportation Secretary John Volpe over such issues

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as control of satellites and the role of AT&T in Comsat.

Even during the euphoric days following the 1972 reelection, Whitehead found he had "blunted his spear" with many people in the White House.

He said they blamed him for suggesting the Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting should be taken off the books and that "paid access" be allowed on network time to let disparate groups "like the Democratic National Committee of Exxon or Rabbi Korff" buy time to present their views without requiring equal time under FCC regulations.

"You've got to understand the climate of the Nixon administration then," Whitehead said. "There was the heady feeling of power with four years more and everybody was riding high.

"There were some people at the White House," said Whitehead, "who considered the Fairness Doctrine a tool" to keep the networks in line." He declined, however, to name names.

It was at this "heady"

time, says Whitehead, that he decided to deliver his Indianapolis speech, which he says he wrote with the aid of Henry Goldberg, now general counsel of OTP ("Those phrases were my phrases, however," says Whitehead).

"I made the calculated decision that the only way to preserve OTP and its mission was to package a program and make it clear to the President, the press and the public.

"I offered a broadcast license renewal bill that was definitely pro-First Amendment and which gave broadcasters relief from FCC program regulation while coupling it with responsibility to the public. At the same time I wasn't going to say everything was hunky-dory with network news."

"The great tragedy," Whitehead recalls, "was that the relations between the administration and the media were so bad. I knew damned well the networks would flail the speech but I thought the broadcasters would support the bill. They did, but not publicly."

Whitehead also asserts that after his four years as a gadfly at OTP, his own values are "on the side of the publishing and broadcasting interests."

Whitehead said that President Nixon "backed me 100 per cent" in White House squabbles with the powerful men in the administration, right up to the time the long-range funding bill for public broadcasting came across Mr. Nixon's desk last June.

The funding bill and a long-range cable industry plan were the two key pieces of legislation that had kept Whitehead at OTP during the dark days of the growing Watergate crisis, the "two pieces of business (he) wanted to leave behind on my record."

In June, the word got out that Mr. Nixon was planning to kill the public broadcast bill, with its appropriation of more than \$400 million over five years, as being too costly.

Whitehead now reveals he was ready to resign if the bill had not been signed and

passed on to Congress.

But, he said recently, with the aid of White House pressure from Gen. Alexander Haig, Dean Burch and Peter Flanigan, the then-President reconsidered and signed the legislation, which had been authored by Whitehead.

Whitehead added that former White House press secretary Ron Ziegler and he "just didn't mesh" and seemed vaguely puzzled as he recalled that "some people in the media, like Walter Cronkite, took my speeches personally."

He is sure that OTP, which was created by President Nixon in 1970 on the basis of recommendations by the Rostow Commission (set up by President Johnson), has a worthwhile role.

OTP oversees for the executive branch the \$5 billion-a-year federal electronics complex including such diverse items as GSA data banks, broadcast spectrums for the military, and satellites, as well as policy roles of the politically-independent FCC, which answers only to Congress.

As for his role in the secret transition planning group, Whitehead admits that it stirred something deep within him, particularly as the time of the changeover actually arrived.

In early May, Whitehead was approached by Phillip Buchen, the longtime personal friend of Gerald Ford. The two men had met in 1970 when Buchen had served on an international satellite treaty group at the State Department.

Over dinner at Whitehead's home, the two discussed with Whitehead the problems of planning for a possible change in administrations.

Eventually a group was formed that included William Scranton, Bryce Harlow, Sen. Robert Griffin, former Rep. John Byrnes of Wisconsin, former NATO

ambassador Donald Rumsfeld and William Whyte, a representative of U.S. Steel here and also a longtime Ford friend, among others. Whitehead eventually emerged as "executive director."

After months of secret meetings, many of them in the dining room of Whitehead's Georgetown home, a "black book" was drawn up carefully detailing the stages of a possible transition.

The job was completed shortly before August 6, the day Whitehead made his final appearance before the Senate Commerce Committee as OTP director. That same afternoon, Whitehead submitted his resignation to Mr. Nixon.

His wife, Margaret, had already left town by automobile for their proposed two weeks vacation in Aspen, Colo.

That night, Whitehead was visiting a sister in Burke, Va., when at 11 p.m. the call came from Buchen. The transition was only 72 hours away and Whitehead was needed.

Whitehead, who plans to write a book on politics while serving as a fellow at Harvard's Institute of Politics in Cambridge, Mass., this coming year, returned late that night to his empty home.

"I called my wife in Kansas city and told her not to expect me at the airport the next day," he recalled.

"Then I went into my study where my two favorite pictures are."

"They're copper lithographs by Edward Curtis of two American Indians," said Whitehead. "I remember sitting there that night looking at those pictures and reflecting on the immense complexity of the United States presidency and its problems and I wondered what those two old Indians would think about it all today."